

MEETING MINUTES
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2024
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM – 2427 Main Street

Call to Order: Chairman Atallah called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

Roll Call & Self Introductions: Chairman Atallah called for self-introductions. Those present provided brief self-introductions. The following persons were recorded in attendance:

Present: Chairman Younes Atallah, Vice Chair Charlie Lopez-Quintana, Treasurer Karen Ginsberg, Secretary Lauralee Asch, Member Neil Carrey, Member Shahid Kayani, Member Jan Williamson.

Also Present: Vice President at The Athens Group Dustin Peterson, SMTT President & Chief Executive Officer Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano, SMTT Senior Director of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Senior Director of Marketing Mandy Eck, SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus, SMTT Client Services Manager Alyssa Dorn, SMTT Administrative Assistant Bella Cifuentes.

Arrived After Roll Call: Member Darlene Evans arrived 5:20pm. Member Kera Blades-Snell arrived 5:24pm. Member Jeff Klocke arrived 5:30pm.

Absent: City Manager David White.

Public Comment: Chairman Atallah called for public comment. There was none.

Closed Session Postponement: Member Kayani motioned to move the closed session to the end of the meeting and Chairman Atallah seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote with City Manager White and Members Blades-Snell, Evans, and Klocke absent.

Fairmont Miramar Project: Guest presenter Dustin Peterson informed the Board that the Fairmont Miramar project has progressed through several phases, beginning with the Council's approval in 2020 followed by the Coastal Commission's approval in 2022. Most recently, on July 15, 2024, the project design received unanimous approval from the Architectural Review Board. The next critical step will take place on October 14, 2024, when The Athens Group will present the proposal to the Landmarks Commission for their consideration.

This design aims to honor the historical significance of the site while incorporating the landmarks of the Moreton Bay Fig Tree and the Palisades Building. This vision includes the creation of a lush garden featuring sustainable California native plants, enhancing pedestrian experiences, and fostering a welcoming environment for the community. Key features of the project include the establishment of a seamless pedestrian pathway connecting the Palisades Building and the Moreton Bay Fig Tree through the hotel lobby. Additionally, the site will open toward Ocean Avenue, providing an inviting space for both pedestrians and the community.

The hotel will also house residents on the upper two floors, featuring private spaces including pool(s), and will offer outdoor dining options to the public at the intersection of Wilshire and Ocean with a café on the street level and The Bungalow on the second floor. The project aims to remain true to the Palisades Building's heritage by incorporating a "Hotel Miramar" rooftop sign designed in the building's historic style and reestablishing the historic garden entry to the hotel via the Palisades Building. Furthermore, it strives to integrate new architecture with historical elements, including a revised design for the California Building that reflects feedback from the Architectural Review Board. Peterson also mapped out the plan for developing affordable housing on a lot east of Second Street, adjacent to the Fairmont Miramar.

The Fairmont Miramar project is anticipated to serve as a significant economic driver for the city. While an official start date has not yet been established, the pre-construction and permitting phase is expected to take approximately 15 to 18 months, followed by approximately three years dedicated to construction. Upon completion, the hotel will feature 300 rooms, consistent with its current inventory, and approximately 8,000 square feet of event space, primarily in one large ballroom.

Approval of the July 17, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes: Secretary Asch presented the July 17, 2024 meeting minutes. Member Carrey moved to approve the minutes and Member Evans seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Secretary Asch abstaining and City Manager White absent.

Acceptance of the May 2024 Financials: Treasurer Ginsberg presented the June and July 2024 financial memos and cash basis documents. Member Carrey moved to accept the financials and Member Lopez-Quintana seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with City Manager White absent.

SMTT Staff Updates:

SMTT President & CEO Kerns provided the board with an update that the Extra Bedroom program will return from November 11, 2024, to February 10, 2025, to help attract hotel business during the shoulder and holiday seasons with discounted rates for Santa Monica residents. This initiative aims to enhance community relations and promote local hotels.

Los Angeles Tech Week will take place from October 13 to October 20, 2024. The Santa Monica Innovation Hub will kick off the week with a technology street fair on Ocean Avenue October 14, anticipated to attract over 2,000 participants from the tech industry. Kerns additionally highlighted that Cirque du Soleil is returning to Santa Monica after a 10-year hiatus and SMTT is collecting specials, discounts and promotions from local businesses that will be featured on SMTT's Cirque du Soleil landing page. These promotions cannot include hotel room rates or event venue rates, due to Cirque du Soleil's existing contracts and ticket/hotel room packages.

Kerns also updated the Board on SMTT's fall media campaign led by Datafy. Initial key performance indicators from August 15 to September 15 show nearly two million impressions and over 4,000 clicks. Meanwhile, SMTT's Noble Studios campaign seeks to differentiate Santa Monica as the original and the premier luxury beach destination. Upcoming efforts include launching Connected TV tactics in September and new digital ads in October. Additionally, the Santa Monica Travel & Tourism Co-op campaign offers hotels a chance to partner with SMTT for \$10,000 to receive focused/targeted ads for their property and insights using Datafy's database from October 1 to November 15 aims to attract high-value leads.

SMTT Senior Director of Communications Salisbury highlighted the recent earned media coverage featuring Olympic volleyball player Kerri Walsh-Jennings that garnered significant attention during her appearance in Paris. This coverage effectively promoted Santa Monica as a premier destination for beach volleyball that encapsulates the essence of the "ultimate California lifestyle." A strategic video capture approach was employed to pitch the story, which resulted in substantial earned media coverage, including features in major publications, achieving significant audience reach of 814,726,893 with an ad value of \$5,842,012.42. Social media insights indicated record-breaking engagement levels on social media content, especially posts showcasing Santa Monica's sunsets and the iconic Pier, strengthening the destination's appeal.

SMTT Director of Global Business Development Sigalus updated the Board on SMTT's attendance at Virtuoso Travel Week in Las Vegas. SMTT connected with 64 travel advisors from countries such as Australia, the U.K., the U.S., Mexico, Canada, and Brazil, leading to several site inspections and FAM requests. Then September 10 – 12, the sales team engaged with 40 Canadian trade clients, including travel advisors and meeting professionals alongside representatives from Shutters on the Beach, Hotel Casa del Mar, Sandbourne Santa Monica and Regent Santa Monica Beach during a successful Vancouver Sales Mission.

Sigalus also provided the Board with details regarding upcoming events including ILTM North America from September 23 to 26 in Baha Mar, The Bahamas, where 46 appointments with luxury travel advisors were held. In addition, the Australia Sales & Media Mission will happen from September 30 to October 4 in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney with participation from several hotel representatives. Brand USA Travel Week in London from October 21st to 24th will facilitate discussions on opportunities to increase U.S. visitation in collaboration with Greater Palm Springs. Meanwhile, SMTT's partnership with Cirque du Soleil Kooza will run from October 19 to December 1, featuring ten hotels as exclusive accommodation options for visitors to bundle accommodations with event tickets. The platform Jampack offers tailored hotel and event ticket packages for a seamless travel experience.

On the group sales side, SMTT's sales team attended IBTM Americas from August 20 to 23 to showcase offerings in corporate meetings. Coming up October 8 – 10, IMEX America will allow our team to hold one-on-one meetings with MICE professionals from around the world. Additionally, SMTT will host a group of 15 travel advisors from Team Landers of ConferenceDirect from October 20 to 22 to showcase our product for potential group bookings in Santa Monica.

CEO Update: SMTT President & CEO Kerns shared a travel forecast from Visit California with the Board that indicated growth is normalizing. There are several headwinds facing the tourism industry, including the news cycle on the California wildfire season (and visitors' misconceptions of CA geography that causes them to be unsure whether wildfires are affecting Santa Monica), non-favorable exchange rates and more outbound than inbound travel.

Another obstacle is a long visa wait time; while there is significant demand for U.S. visas from India, for example, applicants are facing a wait time exceeding 400 days. The Board noted that Global Entry is being expanded to include other countries, aiming to facilitate quicker entry into the United States at airports.

In response to a question from Member Williamson regarding the status of informational kiosks, Kerns informed the Board that advertisements for these kiosks are sold out months in advance, and plans are underway to install more kiosk locations. In her upcoming meeting with BIG Outdoor, Kerns will address the Board's concern that users may not realize the kiosks are interactive touch screens by proposing the idea of implementing a starting message on the screen to highlight its interactive features.

The Board also engaged in a discussion about enhancing security around the Pier. Suggestions included increasing fines for littering and boosting policing in the area; however, they acknowledged challenges related to hiring and limited resources. Kerns encouraged attendees to bring their concerns to the attention of the City Council.

For the Good of the Order:

- Member Williamson informed the Board that Tom Van Sant's Geosphere Project: An Earth Twin at the Digital Dawn is now live at the 18th Street Art Center through February 1, 2025. The project displays a historic convergence of art, science, and environmental advocacy.

Closed Session: The closed session of the meeting started at 6:40 p.m.

Adjournment: Chairman Atallah adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

Next Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, November 13, 2024

MISSION STATEMENT

Santa Monica Travel and Tourism (SMTT) works to strengthen our local economy by enhancing and promoting our community as a distinctive, compelling and welcoming travel destination.

BRAND PROMISE

Santa Monica...an unforgettable beach city experience filled with eye-catching people, cutting edge culture and bold innovations. It's the essence of the California lifestyle.

VISION STATEMENT

To ensure Santa Monica is recognized as the premier beach city destination in the world.